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LEVEL news

Volume 2, Number 4 **April 14, 1994**

Possibility of Ice and Storm Damage Diminishes

Lake Levels Begin Seasonal Rise

The ice is slow in leaving the Great Lakes this year, but concerns about possible ice jams and shoreline damage are diminishing. The thickness and extent of the ice has caused a lag of two to two-and-a-half weeks in the spring ice melt.

Environment Canada's Ice Centre observed that by early April Lake St. Clair, the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers, were virtually ice free; as was Lake Ontario as far east as the Bay of Quinte and the head of the St. Lawrence River.

Northern and Western Lake Huron had open water by early April, but an unusual ice bridge between the Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin Island prevented loose ice from leaving Georgian Bay. Lake Superior's northern half was free of ice at the beginning of the month.

Lake Erie's western basin and most of its central basin were open, but ice remained east of Long Point. This caused a delay beyond April 1 in removal of the Niagara River ice boom. The boom is installed every winter to reduce the risk of ice jams in the River. General ice conditions delayed the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway for about a week to April 5.

As spring progresses, the risk of ice jams and damage to shoreline areas will rapidly decrease until the ice disappears.

Although the lakes -- with the exception of Lake Superior -- began their seasonal water level rises in March, Lakes St. Clair, Erie and Ontario remain below their levels of the same time last year. Lakes Superior and Huron are slightly above last year's levels.

With Lakes Huron, St. Clair and Erie between 22 and 36 cm above their early April averages, there is some risk of localized flooding during spring storms. Lake Superior began April at 4 cm above its average level, while Lake Ontario's level was 9 cm below average. Precipitation over the Great Lakes Basin was 74% of average in March.

Public Information Meetings

International Lake Superior Board of Control	Tuesday Evening, June 14, 1994 Duluth, Minnesota
International St. Lawrence River Board of Control	Tuesday Evening, June 21, 1994 Oswego, New York

Details on the exact times and locations will be provided in a later issue of the *Level News*.

Commission Releases Report On Water Levels

On March 31, the International Joint Commission released its report to the Canadian and U.S. Governments recommending ways to alleviate damages associated with fluctuating levels and flows of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. The report is based on six years of scientific and engineering studies, together with public consultation.

In its report, the Commission recommends:

- Continued use and promotion of an ecosystem approach to managing water levels and flows;
- Use of the Study's public involvement experience as a model for future large-scale natural resource studies;
- Completion of an inventory of existing wetlands, and long-term evaluation of the effects on wetlands of water level fluctuations;
- A sample potential damage survey to improve flood damage estimates, with Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River as the first priority;
- Storm and flood damage assessments immediately following such events;
- Long-term monitoring of shoreline erosion and bluff recession;
- Improved information bases for: land use, shoreline areas vulnerable to storm surge, and shoreline installations at risk;
- Studies to improve forecasting of frequency of extreme water level events;
- No further consideration to five-lake regulation (addition of structures to regulate the levels and flows of all five Lakes); and, the Commission, "does not believe that the case has been made for three-lake regulation" (addition of a structure in the Niagara River to regulate the levels and outflows of Lake Erie);
- The Commission will review recommendations by the Levels Reference Study Board for changes to lake level regulation plans for Lakes Superior and Ontario; and it., "will examine several proposals to improve the visibility, transparency and accessibility of the (lake level) regulation process".
- The Commission recommends that Governments take steps to control, "actions on one side of the boundary that affect water levels and flows on the other side, particularly with respect to activities that constrict the capacity of the connecting channels";

- That shore protection measures be considered by Governments only when other alternatives are not appropriate;
- That Governments, "aggressively promote the use of shoreline land use and management measures...as the principal component of a strategy to alleviate the adverse consequences of fluctuating water levels";
- An information centre as a binational federal effort to communicate with the public on Great Lakes-St. Lawrence issues;
- Improvements to information bases and analytical techniques related to precipitation and runoff forecasting and improvements to public availability of risk information;
- Binational coordination and setting of national and international standards for geographic information systems (GIS) development related to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River;
- Continuation of efforts to develop a binational assessment of the potential impacts of climate change on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system;
- That the potential impacts within and outside the basin of manipulating major water diversions be determined before conclusions are reached about their possible use as crisis relief measures; and,
- That both Federal Governments, in cooperation with state, provincial and local governments, initiate, "comprehensive, coordinated emergency preparedness planning for water level crises...", and that post-crisis assessments be made.

For Copies of the Commission's Report Entitled:

Methods of Alleviating the Adverse Consequences of Fluctuating Water Levels in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin: A Report to the Governments of Canada and the United States

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